DEDICATION

American Feminist, Activist and Writer,
Betty Friedan (1921–2006)

Civil Rights and Equal Rights Activist,
Coretta Scott King (1907-2006)

Feminist Art Activist and Writer, Critic and Curator,
Arlene Raven (1944-2006)

Feminist Art Activist, Artist, Writer, and Critic,
Tee Corinne (1943-2006)

Feminist and Environmental Art Activist, Writer and Curator,
Jo Hanson (1918-2007)
After my father died, I became interested in making a video about my relationship with him. At the same time, in my work as an artist and a teacher, I had grown increasingly skeptical about a mode of confession that was pervasive in contemporary (feminist) video art. I therefore approached this project as a concurrent exploration of women’s relationships with our fathers and an investigation of testimony and its critique. As part of this project, I interviewed six women working in truth professions (Law, Literary Criticism, Psychoanalysis, Religion, Theatre, Videography) about their engagements with veracity: professional truth, practice, credibility, lying, personal truth, core truth, confession, artistic truth, and relative truth. For the video, I edited these interviews into a conversational format. A partial transcript of that dialogue follows. Susan David Bernstein, Rosemary Bodolay, Patricia Boyette, Rita Clark, Mary Catherine Fons, and Clare Wagner played the participating roles (fig. 2-5):

Dominican Sister: The question of truth is very important for me. I belong to a Dominican order whose motto is veritas, which is the Latin word for “truth.” It’s in our documents, “participate in the unfolding of truth.” From the time many, many years ago when I was eighteen years old and joined this community, that has been held up for me: “Search of the truth. Go for the truth.”

Psychoanalyst: In my work I deal with truth all the time, because the question of different perceptions comes into it and each player in a situation usually feels that they have some aspect of the truth, in fact, a bigger part of the truth than the next person. There is a way of doing psychotherapy which involves you and the patient together constructing a narrative that feels truthful. Sometimes I do this with patients, but the thing that I make sure that they understand is that what we’re doing is not arriving at some absolute truth, but that we’re doing something that’s going to help them feel better and give them a rationale—

Attorney: Truth is vital in the work that I do in terms of being a lawyer. People think about lawyers as being those trying to find the truth, trying to determine the truth, trying to prove that in a courtroom. In
law school, we are indoctrinated to learn that there is a truth in every case that you are working on; there is a truth and you need to figure out what that is. That’s going to get you to win this case. If the truth is on your side, then you are going to win.

Literary Critic: Truth, per se, isn’t something I would identify as an abiding interest but power relations were really central to that. I would say that a certain kind of truth, political truth, or truth of power dynamics, shape the disclosure of some kind of transgressive or disruptive information or revelation. The idea of fixed truth is something that I am always working against or trying to trouble with my students in the classroom and also in terms of the research and writing that I do.

Actor: Acting is creating the illusion of truth, hopefully to get to a deeper truth. A lot of people think of acting as wearing a mask, lying, manipulating, essentially tricking them into believing. I think it’s quite the opposite. I don’t think there is a lot of difference between coaching someone to be an effective actor, to create an effective character, and coaching someone to communicate more effectively in different situations.

Videographer: As a media maker I’m interested in thinking about what’s in the frame as well as what’s not in the frame. Documentary work is more interesting with multiple truths complicate a subject than point counterpoint. A tape with multiple perspectives is more truthful.

Attorney: In my work as a lawyer it’s important that I am truthful and that I feel that I am being truthful. Those are two different things.

Psychoanalyst: I do some courtroom work, testimony, and it’s always a little bit funny to me when they ask me: “Are you going to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” And I always say, “Oh yes, I do. You know. I give them the required answer. I guess I’m giving them a truthful opinion.”

Videographer: I think that there are certain contexts where I wouldn’t tell the whole truth, not all the details about my past, but I hope I would express truthfulness.

Dominican Sister: Truth is more than just facts or congruency. Truth is the probing of mystery of oneself and the universe.

Actor: When I’m teaching, that is where I feel I have the greatest responsibility to being truthful.

Literary Critic: It depends on what kind of truth you are after. Are you talking about personal disclosure, truths of one’s life, or are you talking about professional truth?

Actor: If there is someone that I find very believable, I don’t think about believing them, it’s very easy.

Attorney: I follow the feelings I get from them when I first meet with them. What they tell me. Whether what they tell me rings true with my experience as a lawyer and as a person.

Psychoanalyst: You know, you can tell if somebody is sincerely believing what they’re trying tell you about, something they’re trying to sell you, is, if they’re really enthusiastic, or if it’s something they’re doing just to manipulate you.

Dominican Sister: Ordinarily, when someone looks me in the eyes I can intuit if what they are saying is coming from the heart.

Attorney: When I believe, I suppose it’s a lot of different factors why I believe them. I suppose it’s the way they hold their body and their smile and if they look me in the eyes.

Videographer: Something that would make me believe or not believe would be how often someone is willing to make eye contact.

Dominican Sister: The lack of willingness to look into my eyes when we are dialoguing in my profession and the constant looking around or out the window rather than making eye contact...
Literary Critic: I can imagine all sorts of circumstances where a person is relaying a very difficult truth and would need to look away for all sorts of reasons from the eyes of their listener.

Attorney: I think it would happen quite frequently that someone is telling the truth and would not be believed. That's very common in the context of my work.

Actor: A lot of times there's an overcompensation in some way. It could be with the voice. It could be with the body or the manner. It can be in being oversold, over-intellectualized. It can be in appealing to sentiment. There's something that is over the mark.

Attorney: Being thoughtful can be a good thing and looking like you are thoughtful. However, in a courtroom that can come off like you are in the process of making up the story as you are sitting there.

Literary Critic: I think there are so many different ways of performing what one knows from laughing to seeming very uncomfortable to speaking in a very compelling way. There are all sorts of ways of explaining where those different levels of performance comfort come from.

Actor: I think that the actor, or the person who is not an actor, has to really believe in what they are saying to be believed by someone else. I think that's the way communication works. If they don't really believe it, there is going to be something that's less than complete, there is something held back. They are communicating only 70 percent and I think we pick up on that.

Attorney: They have to be able to tell the story first of all. Some people even though the truth is in there, they aren't able to convey it. They have to be able to explain what happened. They have to be wounded, but not whiners. They have to be able to convey accurately what their story is, but not sound like they are overdoing what has happened to them.

Literary Critic: How you are able to command language and execute your particular word has a lot to do with how that particular truth is understood.

Videographer: There's lots of cultural differences in the ways people think about sharing truth.

Psychoanalyst: In certain cultures, people don't like to come out directly with unpleasant facts. They work around them.

Literary Critic: Relaying a particular kind of truth could be very difficult for somebody, and yes, it could be extremely true.

Attorney: We don't believe people if our experience of what they are telling us doesn't ring true and if they don't look like someone we have been brought up to think tells the truth. We have prejudices against teenagers, against people who have too many tattoos, against people whose hair is purple, or maybe their skin isn't the same color as all the people we have been brought up with.

Videographer: Where you put someone in the frame tells a lot about their expertise or believability as a storyteller.

Literary Critic: Then you have to pay attention to what is the scene of confession, who is making the disclosure, what are the assumptions that frame that disclosure. What are the relationships involved?

Actor: The people being spoken to are part of this—what their expectations are, what they are willing to accept or not accept, what happened right before or right after.

Psychoanalyst: It's not just the person, you are dealing with an interaction, you've got a total structure there with let's say two people. You have to tell the truth and the person has to want to believe that's the truth and then it goes very smoothly.

Actor: The most conflict is when there is someone we actually believe and then the rug is pulled out from under us.

Videographer: I feel sick if I have a sense that somebody's not being truthful or a situation is not revealing itself in a truthful way.

Psychoanalyst: People do lie consciously or unconsciously.

Dominican Sister: There are times when all of us seek cover out of embarrassment.

Videographer: I think if I had a sense that I wasn't sure about the believability, I would just keep coming back at it.

Psychoanalyst: You never would say to someone, "I think you're lying to me." Not usually.

Actor: Someone who is a good liar believes in what they are saying. I think they are also able to drop out of it and not have a conscience that bothers them in terms of inconsistency in dropping in and out of the lie.

Psychoanalyst: I think we've seen a lot of that in public officials and certain business men who look so sincere and they're lying.

Actor: Politicians sometimes really believe what they are saying or alcoholics really believe when they are under the influence and then afterwards say, "Oh I never said that."

Attorney: I expect other lawyers to be lying to me. I expect sometimes clients to be lying to me. I expect other people's clients to be lying to me and I have to sift through.

Psychoanalyst: When a patient comes to me for help and then they lie to me, and I'm talking about conscious lying, I'm not talking about
unconscious defenses like denial, I am very concerned because they are violating the basic premises of the treatment which is some truthfulness between them and me.

Attorney: In my agreement that I have when a client hires me, it says that if I find out that something they told me isn’t true, I can no longer represent them. I believe that breaks the bond I have with them, and my ability to be an effective advocate for them.

Psychoanalyst: I have to make them see the tremendous disadvantage that they are creating for themselves and if they don’t see it, and can’t get past it, and we can’t form a therapeutic alliance and that’s the end of the treatment. I just can’t treat someone who is going to continue to lie to me.

Attorney: I expect much more truthfulness in my personal life than I do in my professional life.

Psychoanalyst: I think I’m more off guard when I’m dealing with family or friends, or anybody not in the office.

Attorney: In my personal relationships with my family and my friends I always expect that everything they tell me is the truth.

Psychoanalyst: With a friend, if I think they are doing something that I would consider less than honest, I would probably just let it go.

Literary Critic: I don’t make a big distinction between truth telling at work and at home.

Psychoanalyst: I expect that people will be telling the truth unless proven otherwise. I think I have that assumption, that most people are truthful except for certain kinds of salesmen.

Attorney: I doubt the words that anyone says, that is trying to sell me anything.

Literary Critic: When there is not a clear motivation for dissembling then I don’t really question whether somebody is telling the truth or not.

Videographer: I hope that in my life every circumstance that I come across I am working at being truthful and honest.

Dominican Sister: I keep myself honest, moving toward the truth, in a couple of ways. I listen to my friends and ask for their feedback.

Attorney: I have an inner code. I have an inner feeling that requires that I tell the truth.

Dominican Sister: I do pray a lot and I’m especially prone to a kind of silent Zen-like prayer in which I find myself trying to reach deeper and to find the place in myself where the truth lives.

Videographer: Part of my work as a maturing human being is that everyday is constant work on myself, approaching a life of honesty and truthfulness.

Psychoanalyst: When I say truth is really a thing and I talk about somebody being truthful what I mean is that they are saying something that they believe is truthful, they’re not consciously distorting or lying. That’s truth.

Attorney: Truth telling can be very powerful.

Dominican Sister: Every person carries around a spark of the truth and an evolving understanding to the truth.

Actor: There’s a truth that’s hard to articulate, but it is absolutely understood when it is experienced.

Dominican Sister: I think what I talk about more is the truth that involves the mind and the heart.

Actor: When it’s experienced it’s unmistakable. It gives you goose bumps. It makes the hair on your neck stand up, when you experience something that is truthful to the core.

Dominican Sister: You go layer by layer, and if a person is willing to open up what is it that you want more than that, then you get to the place where truth lives.

Psychoanalyst: Part of my job is to help them get through that and just get to the simple truth in quotation marks.

Dominican Sister: Maybe, if you wanted to say truth with no quotes, we’d almost have to say divine mystery or the sacred presence in the universe or whatever and then we could say truth with a capital T.

Actor: It’s as though our reality that’s experienced is only the tip of the iceberg. It’s what is underneath that I think is really interesting. It’s what’s not said as well as what’s said. It’s what resonates.

Dominican Sister: There are moments when a person finds truth in a very low point in life, in a great struggle, in a great crisis, even in grieving, and the moment when they start to see hope is another illuminating moment.

Literary Critic: I have found a way into an actively religious life that doesn’t revolve around certain larger order truths.

Psychoanalyst: There is a core belief I have in my own ability to adapt and survive, not anything, but many things. I have seen this through my life, that I can call on resources from within myself to manage certain things, and I guess that’s about as core a belief as I have. I certainly have no core belief in anything outside that is going to help me.

Actor: I think for me the theater has been a substitute for religious experience because it is dealing with the same things that churches are dealing with. It’s a searching for deeper truths, that is what art is about.

Dominican Sister: The imagination is key in the pursuit of truth. When someone ponders (the way a fiction writer or a poet would) a piece of
reality, and then crafts it into something beautiful, there we have an emblem of truth.

Psychoanalyst: It’s all in the details. They become three-dimensional. You don’t get a shadow puppet figure just giving you a line. But the way they look, their body language and the details of the scene they may be set in, it’s all contributing very, very much to the performance, at least the kind of performance I like to go to. It all works together. It hits all the senses.

Actor: You really do find a way in the way a child would do when playing make-believe. Essentially, it’s the same thing, so that you really can, through your imagination, see out of another person’s eyes and walk in their shoes.

Videographer: I’m interested in the feeling when you are done with a novel, or a film, whether you feel that you actually have discovered a truth.

Attorney: I look to novels, I look to movies for truth. I get totally immersed in the theatre or when I’m reading a book. I believe the character. I believe they are representing somebody’s life.

Actor: I think that there is a lot of correlation between truth and art.

Psychoanalyst: I am never looking for the truth when I go to a film or read a novel. I’m looking for maybe some insights into human behavior. I’m looking to be entertained, maybe to have some catharsis. I’m not looking for the truth in that setting. Not at all.

Actor: If you are in a theater, and seeing a play, obviously that play is not what is happening in the world, it’s a representation.

Videographer: Whether I feel like I’ve learned something about a truth might be different from whether individual characters were believable.

Actor: I think sometimes when we experience art it becomes a truth that is more real than most of the things that actually happen to us in our real life.

Literary Critic: I’m interested in this phenomenon of reading or viewing a film or television in which one crosses a line from seeing this as a fiction or a performance to believing that it is real.

Psychoanalyst: What has happened with the recovered memory movement is that people get this memory and then treat it as if it’s an absolute truth and then go and do all kinds of things in the real world, like seeking revenge or restitution. They’re giving it more solidity than they really should, and they’re getting other people involved, which they really should not.

Actor: When I was in grad school, I ran across some information about a group of students in the inner city, who had taken an imaginary fishing trip, who could remember the trip with as much detail as those who had gone on an actual trip.

Literary Critic: And of course this is the power of fiction, of all sorts of creative performances, textual or visual. But I think there is also value in stepping back and looking at what’s involved in that process of identification rather than just taking it as a given.

Videographer: I think I’m finding that I’m more interested in and attached to reading fictional accounts for some of the kinds of truths that I’m interested in. I’m very interested in the subjective notions that surround truth and people finding their way to their personal lives and finding truth in their life or in the world.

Literary Critic: I think that fiction provides a variety of different kinds of strategies to get at a kind of truth that is not evidentiary. It’s not based on real fact that happens in the real world but something that is hard to articulate that has to do with the cadence of reality.

Videographer: Perhaps art making has to do with truths and what are those truths. Are those truths a little more metaphysical? Are those truths more in the world of philosophical truths?

Literary Critic: I think that the status of truth has been so interrogated, so dismantled, so questioned from so many different directions, that the idea that there are fixed truths in the world doesn’t seem like a particularly useful theoretical concept.

Attorney: Every political belief I hold dear, and know to be true... But I have friends who believe the opposite and they believe it. It’s the truth.

Dominican Sister: It’s very dangerous about truth to say we’ve got a hold on one truth and no one else has the truth we have.

Psychoanalyst: I say true to whom and when and why?

Actor: I don’t have a lot of absolute truths.

Videographer: Truth shifts over time.

Psychoanalyst: I’m not uncomfortable with the idea of changing belief systems as life goes on.

Actor: It’s not something that’s set and static at all.

Videographer: What for me seems to be true in a moment is not necessarily the truth.

Psychoanalyst: Truth is a relative concept. It’s something that can be very useful but I wouldn’t use it as a stick to beat anybody with.

Literary Critic: There are no whole truths or whole knowledges or complete knowledges but there are partial situated knowledges that one can collect different pieces of knowledge and assemble some sense of what truths there are.

Videographer: I think that the word truth for me is problematic.
Literary Critic: People define truth in so many different ways. There are so many examples.
Actor: It's just overwhelming because if you start by talking about definition of truth, is that there are so many different definitions.
Videographer: I don't believe there is "the truth." I believe there is a truth that is mine and a truth that is another person's.
Dominican Sister: If a person is looking for truth and reaches a point where they can dialogue with another person, that's a breakthrough.

ANONYMITY AS A POLITICAL TACTIC:
ART BLOGS, FEMINISM, WRITING, AND POLITICS
MIRA SCHOR

"I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman."
— A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf

In the historical situation named by Virginia Woolf, writing in 1929, at the end of the first great wave of the suffrage movement, anonymity was the tragic fate of the brilliant woman whose existence one can only deduce based on the laws of chance and general experience of human talents, just as one deduces the existence of dark stars by the gravity that veils their presence from our traditional measuring devices. If ever, or whenever, genius existed in a woman and made its way into cultural form, it was reattributed to a named man or relegated to "Anon," her name erased by propriety, misogyny, and neglect.

In recent years, anonymity has been used as a protective political tactic: for instance in the 1980s and 1990s, the Guerrilla Girls chose anonymity in order to foreclose on career retribution and the danger of being individually dismissed as untalented artists operating out of a sense of sour grapes in their critiques of inequitable representation of women and artists of color in the art world.2

The question of anonymity as a political tactic is of particular interest when discourse occurs in a space without physical presence. Debate and discourse on art now frequently takes place on blogs, which often rely on anonymity to enable uncensored speech. These new blogs and Web sites, with varying degrees of intellectual ambition, political focus, and textual informality, suggest a reconsideration of the role of anonymity as a political tactic for any political cause, but here specifically as it relates to feminist activism at a time when there seem to be fewer public voices for feminism, in a media atmosphere that is generally repressive of alternate points of view, and where collaboration-ist dissimulation of a clear...